

How Does Syrianus Conceive of Aristotle's Theory of the Unmoved Mover: Polemical or Reconciliatory?

Tianqin Ge

IT HAS OFTEN been claimed that Syrianus and Proclus have a comparatively critical and polemical attitude towards Aristotle's philosophy among later Neoplatonists.¹ Although, in the case of Syrianus, this general characterization is less assured, as a number of scholars are willing to ascribe a more reconciliatory attitude to his interpretation of Aristotle,² yet as regards the issue of Aristotle's unmoved movers,³ to my knowl-

¹ See e.g. J. M. Dillon and D. O'Meara, *Syrianus: On Aristotle Metaphysics 13–14* (London 2006) 11–20; C. Helmig, “‘The Truth Can Never Be Refuted’—Syrianus' View(s) on Aristotle Reconsidered,” in A. Longo (ed.), *Syrianus et la métaphysique de l'antiquité tardive* (Naples 2009) 347–380; P. d'Hoine, “Syrianus and Proclus on Aristotle,” in A. Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity* (Leiden 2016) 374–393.

² See I. Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle* (Leiden 2015) 103–115, for a helpful review of Syrianus' general attitude toward Aristotle's philosophy, with an emphasis on Syrianus' more positive stance on Aristotle. See also H. D. Saffrey, “Comment Syrianus, le maître de l'école néoplatonicienne d'Athènes, considèrait-il Aristote?” in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung II* (Berlin 1987) 205–214.

³ In most cases, I do not distinguish Aristotle's prime mover from other unmoved movers, which are famously advocated in *Metaphysics* 12.8, and will speak of the unmoved mover(s) in both singular and plural forms freely. The reason is that when Syrianus talks about the causality of the unmoved mover(s), he treats Aristotle's unmoved mover as a whole, or primarily focuses on the prime mover, although Syrianus sometimes recognizes a hierarchy between them, see Syrian. *In Metaph.* 8.9–11 Kroll. As we shall see, Syrianus also uses a range of words to denote Aristotle's unmoved

edge, virtually all scholars tend to favor the polemical side.⁴ It is generally agreed that Syrianus criticizes Aristotle's characterization of unmoved movers, proposing that Aristotle *should have* acknowledged that his unmoved movers are also efficient causes⁵ besides being final causes,⁶ which would then bring Aristotle into agreement with the mainstream Neoplatonic view. And these scholars unanimously agree that this same critical view on Aristotle's theory of unmoved movers was inherited by his pupil Proclus.⁷

movers, such as ἅλλα εἶδη (this phrase may derive from Alexander of Aphrodisias, cf. Alex. Aphr. *In Metaph.* 179.1 Hayduck), χωριστὰ εἶδη, νοητὰ εἶδη, and so forth. See also M. Frede, "Syrianus on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 23–56, at 34, for a discussion of the issue of a plurality of unmoved movers in Syrianus.

⁴ E.g. Frede, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 51; Helmig, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 363; Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism* 28 n.85, 94 n.113; d'Hoine, in *Reception of Aristotle* 390 (together with Proclus).

⁵ In later Neoplatonism, τὸ ποιητικόν primarily indicates a cause of being or existence, apart from a cause of movement (ποιητικὸν κινήσεως). On τὸ ποιητικόν as a cause of existence see e.g. Procl. *In Ti.* I 266.28–268.6 Diehl; Simpl. *In Phys.* II 1362.11–1363.12 Diels, discussed in R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and their Sequel* (London 1988) 251–253, 274–277; K. Verrycken, "The *Metaphysics* of Ammonius son of Hermeias," in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (Ithaca 1990) 199–231, at 216–218; d'Hoine, in *Reception of Aristotle* 390; P. Golitsis, "Alexandre d'Aphrodise, Simplicius, et la cause efficiente de l'univers," in A. Balansard et al. (eds.), *Alexandre d'Aphrodise et la métaphysique aristotélicienne* (Leuven 2017) 217–235. In this paper, I use the usual rendering "efficient cause," rather than "creative/productive cause," but we should remember that it is understood in the Neoplatonic sense.

⁶ Needless to say, the debate about the causality of Aristotle's unmoved mover continues today, see A. Lagnerini, "Discussion Note on the Causality of the Immovable Mover," *Rhizomata* 3 (2015) 200–213, for a review of recent discussions.

⁷ As a result, modern commentators almost always consider Syrianus and Proclus together, when they are dealing with this problem. A detailed examination of Proclus' interpretation of Aristotle's unmoved mover lies outside the scope of this paper. Compared to Syrianus' reconciliatory stance

One may discern Syrianus' hostile attitude to Aristotle's theory of unmoved movers from T1. He states straightforwardly that Aristotle "does not assign efficient and paradigmatic causality to immaterial forms (i.e. unmoved movers)":

T1: So it has seemed, rightly, not only to the divine Plato, but also to Aristotle. For he says that the principles of the eternal, such as the separately existing immaterial forms, are desired by all, and some of the principles of perishables are eternal. At any rate, he will often worthily prove (also in what follows) that there would be no becoming if there were not some eternal cause for it. Yet it is to this extent that he falls short of (ἀπολείπεται) the philosophy of his father [i.e. Plato], *when he does not assign efficient and paradigmatic causality to immaterial forms* (τοῖς ἀύλοις εἶδεσι ποιητικὴν μὲν αἰτίαν ἢ παραδειγματικὴν οὐ δίδωσι), but a cause that is final and an object of desire. For, according to him, these are desired proximately by the spheres that circle around them, and through these, they are desired by all things in the cosmos. For he also says that all things desire the good, and if there are many goods, they are all ordered to those which are superior and these to one (πάντα πρὸς τὰ κυριώτερα προστέτακται καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς ἓν), the highest and most perfect of all (τὸ ὑπέρτατον καὶ τελικώτατον τῶν ἀπάντων), as he clearly says, we can see, in [book] 12.

In Metaph. 10.32–11.5, transl. O'Meara and Dillon, my emphasis

However, according to a "short but striking"⁸ testimony from

on this issue, as I wish to argue here, Proclus exhibits a more critical attitude, cf. Procl. *In Ti.* I 266.28–30. See C. Steel, "Proclus et Aristote sur la causalité efficiente de l'intellect divin," in J. Pépin et al. (eds.), *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des Anciens* (Paris 1987) 213–225, for a thorough discussion of Proclus' criticism of Aristotle's theory of the unmoved mover; cf. J. Opsomer, "The Integration of Aristotelian Physics in a Neoplatonic Context: Proclus on Movers and Divisibility," in R. Chiaradonna et al. (eds.), *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism* (Leiden 2009) 189–229.

⁸ As Cardullo characterizes it: R. L. Cardullo, "Syrianus défenseur de Platon contre Aristote, selon le témoignage d'Asclépius (*Métaphysique* 433.9–436.6)," in M. Dixsaut (ed.), *Contre Platon. Le platonisme dévoilé* (Paris 1993) 197–214, at 197.

Ammonius son of Hermias (T2 below), preserved in Asclepius of Tralles' commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Syrianus is said to accept that Aristotle himself acknowledges that his unmoved movers are also efficient causes, apart from being final causes. In this way, there emerges a *prima facie* tension between T1 and Ammonius' testimony. We need to make a choice between a more polemical attitude (as can be attested from T1) and a more reconciliatory stance (as can be inferred from Ammonius' report) toward Aristotle's theory of unmoved movers adopted by Syrianus. In this article, I aim to challenge the polemical characterization of Syrianus' appraisal of Aristotle's unmoved movers, arguing that according to Syrianus, Aristotle *himself* does acknowledge that his unmoved movers are also efficient causes.⁹ Therefore, against the commonly accepted view, I propose a more reconciliatory and harmonizing picture with respect to Syrianus' interpretation of Aristotle's unmoved movers, which may shed light for further investigation of Syrianus' legacy to later Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism.¹⁰

In what follows, I shall first, in §1, present Ammonius' testimony and describe this apparent inconsistency between what Syrianus has written in his commentary on Aristotle's *Meta-*

⁹ It is one thing to say that (a) someone simply regards Aristotle's unmoved mover as an efficient cause, but another to say that (b) she further thinks that Aristotle himself *also acknowledges* that point. The former claim could imply a polemical attitude. For example, Proclus claims that Aristotle's unmoved mover should be an efficient cause, but he meanwhile criticizes Aristotle for *not realizing* this point (again, see *In Ti.* I 266.28–30). In this article I will attribute the latter claim to Syrianus, which points to a reconciliatory stance.

¹⁰ For some recent discussions see P. Golitsis, "Simplicius, Syrianus and the Harmony of Ancient Philosophers," in B. Strobel (ed.), *Die Kunst der philosophischen Exegese bei den spätantiken Platon- und Aristoteles-Kommentatoren* (Berlin 2018) 69–99, and Golitsis, "Ammonius, Simplicius and their Critique of their Athenian Predecessors" (unpublished paper).

physics and what we learn from Ammonius' report. In §2 I will discuss a passage from Syrianus' commentary on the *Metaphysics* with its more nuanced appraisal of Aristotle's unmoved movers, and will maintain that the passage actually brings us to the reconciliatory side with regard to Syrianus' attitude to Aristotle. Moreover (§3), two further passages support Syrianus' reconciliatory attitude. Finally (§4), I will return to T1 and propose two suggestions in order to reconcile T1 with the reconciliatory position: I argue that according to what follows immediately in Syrianus' commentary, he once again attributes the efficient causality to Aristotle's unmoved mover, and he also suggests that Aristotle endorses this point. For this reason, we should adopt a minimalist reading of Syrianus' claim in T1: what he intends to say is merely that Aristotle does not assign efficient causality to unmoved movers *explicitly*.

1. *A prima facie tension*

On the basis of T1 (together with T3, discussed in §2), most scholars contend that Syrianus has a critical attitude toward Aristotle's theory of the unmoved mover. He is unsatisfied with the fact that Aristotle regards the unmoved mover only as a final cause but fails to notice that it should also be an efficient cause. However, according to Ammonius (in his ἀπὸ φωνῆς commentary on the *Metaphysics* recorded by Asclepius),¹¹ Syrianus is reported to have acknowledged that Aristotle himself also takes the unmoved mover as an efficient cause:

T2: Then Aristotle says that an efficient cause is sought in the case of things that come to be and perish; for a human begets a human. In the case of eternal things, however, he says that [what is sought] is a final cause. So <some people say that>¹² Aristotle appears not to

¹¹ Although it is possible that the commentary composed by Asclepius is not always in agreement with the lectures of Ammonius, there is no evidence to suggest that the testimony about Syrianus does not derive from Ammonius but was added by Asclepius himself.

¹² Following Golitsis' suggestion: P. Golitsis, "La Réception de la théo-

be asserting an efficient cause for eternal things at all. But Syrianus says that the reason why Aristotle remained silent about the efficient cause is that *it is generally acknowledged that God is the efficient cause for eternal things*,¹³ while there is no determinate efficient cause for things that come to be, especially not for artefacts, since a house can be produced by different people. However, we [*sc.* Asclepius] have replied to them [perhaps Syrianus and Ammonius] that the final cause is also determined in the case of eternal things, i.e. the Good towards which all things strive [cf. Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1094a3]. And he [perhaps Ammonius] replied that it is the universal Good—not, he specifies, the particular: for instance, if we ask why it [*sc.* the heaven, cf. 448.2–3] moves in a circle, the answer is that it is imitating Intellect.¹⁴

Asclep. *In Metaph.* 450.18–28 Hayduck, my translation¹⁵

In this cryptic passage,¹⁶ when commenting on *Metaphysics* 7.17, 1041a29–32, Ammonius appears to be engaging in dia-

logie d'Aristote chez Michel d'Éphèse et quelques auteurs néoplatoniciens," in F. Baghdassarian et al. (eds.), *La Réception de la théologie d'Aristote* (Leuven 2017) 239–256, at 247.

¹³ Cf. Procl. *In Ti.* I 2.26–27 for a contrasting view: "For they [*sc.* Aristotle] openly deny that there is any productive [cause] of things everlasting" (transl. Tarrant).

¹⁴ See also Plotinus *Enn.* 2.2.1; Phlp. *In De an.* 138.33–139.2 Hayduck.

¹⁵ εἰτά φησιν ὅτι ποιητικὸν αἴτιον ζητεῖται <ἐπὶ τῶν γινο>μένων καὶ φθειρομένων· ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ἄνθρωπον γεννᾷ· <ἐπὶ μὲν>τοι γε τῶν αἰδίων φησὶ τὸ τελικόν. ὥστε οὐ πάνυ τι φαίνεται λέγων ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ποιητικὸν αἴτιον ἐπὶ τῶν αἰδίων. ὁ δὲ Συριανὸς φησιν ὅτι διὰ τοῦτο ἐσιώπησε τὸ ποιητικόν, ἐπειδὴ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰδίων ὁμολογεῖται τὸ ποιητικόν ὅτι θεός, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἐν γενέσει καὶ μάλιστα τῶν τεχνητῶν οὐκ ὀρισμένον· δυνατὸν γὰρ τὸν οἶκον ὑπὸ διαφόρων ἀνθρώπων γενέσθαι. ἡμεῖς δὲ εἰρήκαμεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὅτι καὶ τὸ τελικόν ὄρισται ἐπὶ τῶν αἰδίων, τὰ γὰρ πάντα ἐρίεται. καὶ εἶπεν ὅτι τὸ καθόλου ἀγαθόν, οὐ μέντοι γέ φησι τὸ μερικόν· οἶον διὰ τί κύκλω κινεῖται; ὅτι νοῦν μιμεῖται.

¹⁶ There are a number of textual problems in this passage, but I do not think these and Hayduck's conjectures would affect the reliability of our testimony concerning Syrianus, as almost all occur before the testimony. And even if this testimony does not suit the foregoing exegesis of Aristotle's text very well, it does not imply that the testimony *itself* is unreliable.

logue with certain people: according to these, as Aristotle did not mention an efficient cause for eternal things, he would acknowledge no efficient cause for them; in other words, Aristotle's unmoved mover would not be an efficient cause (450.18–21).¹⁷ Then Ammonius appeals to a doctrine from Syrianus, who says that the reason for Aristotle's silence about the efficient cause is that, according to Aristotle, it is widely acknowledged that God is the efficient cause for eternal things (22–23). At this point, I think Syrianus agrees that Aristotle's God, namely his (prime) unmoved mover,¹⁸ is both an efficient cause and a final cause, a point which is also recognized by Aristotle himself.¹⁹ And in contrast to eternal beings, there is no determinate efficient cause for generable things, so Aristotle needs to seek the efficient cause for these things (23–25).

However, Asclepius (ἠμεῖς) now seems to pose a question to Ammonius and Syrianus (ἀντιτὸς): if we should look for causes

¹⁷ Ammonius may have Alexander in mind, as suggested by Golitsis, in *Réception* 247. But F. A. J. de Haas, "Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias on Active Intellectual Cognition," in V. DeCaix (ed.), *Active Cognition: Challenges to an Aristotelian Tradition* (Cham 2020) 13–36, at 33, claims that Alexander "was closer to regarding the productive intellect as a divine creator than one might think," and "is willing to give 'productive' the sense of being responsible for the existence of all beings."

¹⁸ For Syrianus' identification of Aristotle's prime mover with God see Syrian. *In Metaph.* 162.15–16.

¹⁹ At least the sentence "Syrianus says that the reason why Aristotle remained silent about the efficient cause is that it is generally acknowledged that God is the efficient cause for eternal things" (22–23) is a testimony concerning Syrianus, and this sentence is my focus in this article. Although one may contend that ὁμολογεῖται does not imply that Aristotle must agree on this point, I think what the commentator suggests is that *according to Aristotle*, it is widely acknowledged such and such, hence Aristotle by implication must also endorse this point. As regards the sentence that immediately follows (23–25), it is natural to think that it is also a part of Syrianus' views. But for our purposes, these lines and Asclepius' further elaboration (25–28) do not concern us.

that are not determined (e.g. the efficient causes of things that come to be), as proposed by Ammonius and Syrianus, and since the Good is a determinate final cause of all things, then why does Aristotle say that we should enquire into a final cause of eternal things (450.25–26)? Ammonius (I take him to be the subject of εἶπεν at 26) then replies to Asclepius' question, based on a distinction between the universal cause and the particular cause: the reason why Aristotle here maintains that we should seek a final cause for eternal things is that it is still possible to enquire into a particular final cause for some particular eternal thing (e.g. Intellect is a particular final cause for a certain motion of the heaven), although it is granted that the universal Good is the universal final cause of all eternal things (26–28).²⁰

This is not the place to address all the intricacies in this obscure passage. At any rate, my general proposal in this paper does not hinge on this particular interpretation, and what I would emphasize is that unlike T1, T2 points to a more reconciliatory side to Syrianus' appraisal of Aristotle's unmoved mover. But as things stand, there seems an apparent tension between these two passages. Should we believe Ammonius' report in T2, or rather prefer Syrianus' very words in T1?

A simple solution is that Ammonius simply distorted Syrianus' view, probably in order to bolster his harmonizing agenda concerning Plato and Aristotle,²¹ and hence we must dismiss the reliability of this second-hand report. It is well known that Ammonius thinks that Aristotle's unmoved mover

²⁰ The interpretation of T2 is much indebted to Golitsis, in *Réception* 247–248, and his unpublished paper (n.10 above). I also am most grateful to the anonymous reviewer who helped me to clarify the issue.

²¹ The harmonizing agenda of Ammonius has been a commonplace in modern scholarship, see e.g. Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism* 126–155; R. Sorabji, "Introduction: Seven Hundred Years of Commentary and the Sixth Century Diffusion to Other Cultures," in *Aristotle Re-Interpreted: New Findings on Seven Hundred Years of the Ancient Commentators* (London 2016) 1–80, at 53–55.

is both a final cause and an efficient cause.²² And it is not unreasonable to conceive that Ammonius would adduce Syrianus' authority to strengthen his harmonizing proposal, even if it was not Syrianus' true opinion. However, if this were the case, then it would be unclear how Ammonius could speak of this distortion overtly, without being detected and corrected by other members in the Neoplatonic school. For Syrianus lived not long before Ammonius,²³ and we can assume quite safely that other school members at that time still had access to Syrianus' doctrines in one way or another, although these later members may not have known Syrianus in person.²⁴ Furthermore, Neoplatonic pupils normally showed great respect to their masters, as can be inferred from a variety of Neoplatonic biographies.²⁵ In particular, in his own commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, Ammonius paid tribute to Syrianus for his excellence (*In Int.* 253.12–17 Busse).²⁶ Certainly, this teacher-student relationship does not imply that Ammonius must always agree with Syrianus faithfully; but at least we are entitled to expect

²² E.g. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* 273–277; Verrycken, in *Aristotle Transformed* 215–223; Sorabji, in *Aristotle Re-Interpreted* 53; M. Griffin, “Ammonius and the Alexandrian School,” in *Reception of Aristotle* 394–418, at 403; Golitsis, in *Alexandre d'Aphrodise* 225–228.

²³ For the chronology of Syrianus and Ammonius see e.g. L. G. Westerink, “The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to their Commentaries,” in *Aristotle Transformed* 325–348; Frede, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 23–27; Griffin, in *Reception of Aristotle* 400–402.

²⁴ It is an open question in what form these teachings of Syrianus could be found, see esp. Frede, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 27–30; S. K. Wear, “Oral Pedagogy and the Commentaries of the Athenian Platonic Academy,” *Dionysius* 24 (2006) 7–20, at 12: it could be some written comments, or even oral teachings, but it need not be a ‘running commentary’. On the possible sources of Ammonius' testimony see §3.

²⁵ See esp. M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool 2000); cf. Wear, *Dionysius* 24 (2006) 7–20.

²⁶ As noted by Saffrey, in *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung* II 210.

that Ammonius ought to *report* the view of his master without distortion, and it is separate question whether Ammonius himself accepted Syrianus' views.

Therefore, I think it is more fruitful to adopt a charitable attitude towards Ammonius' testimony, rather than simply discarding it.²⁷ In what follows, I attempt to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible claims, proposing that Syrianus in fact adopted a more reconciliatory position, as is reported by Ammonius.

2. *A more nuanced attitude to Aristotle's unmoved movers in Syrianus*

Apart from T1, the following passage is also used by many scholars to indicate Syrianus' polemical interpretation of Aristotle's unmoved movers. However, in this section, I argue that Syrianus actually takes up a more nuanced attitude in this passage, which implies a reconciliatory view on Aristotle's theory of unmoved movers.

T3: He [Aristotle], however, is so far from having anything to say against the true theory of Plato that, whether he agrees or denies it (κἂν τε συγχωρῇ κἂν τε ἀπαγορεύῃ), it is necessary for him (ἀναγκάζεσθαι) to say the same things in another way (τὰ αὐτὰ τρόπον ἕτερον ἐκείνῳ φθέγγεσθαι). For the separable Forms, according to his theory, are final causes and objects of striving for all things, and causes of the well-being and order and eternity of the cosmos; *but it is then obvious to anyone who looks at the text with proper understanding that they would also be creative causes of things in this realm*; for it cannot be that one thing is cause of something's essence and form, and another thing of its being brought to completion. And if indeed the heavenly bodies are of infinite power by reason of their appetition towards the Forms, either it is from themselves that they possess

²⁷ In a similar vein Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* 278, claims that Ammonius merely reads his idea back into Syrianus. Also, someone might suggest that Asclepius misunderstood Ammonius' view. Arguably, it is always possible to make such suggestions when we are dealing with ancient testimonies. But if we can find some other way to unravel this incongruity, it would be more reasonable to do so.

this appetite and infinite power, or both from those, or at any rate the second is bestowed upon them by those. But they could not be causes for themselves of infinite power; for in the case of every finite entity, the power is also finite. But if either both or only the second is from that source, being as they are providers of natural power and eternity, and causes of existence, to those entities empowered by them, entities that might otherwise not have enjoyed existence, had they not received power from that source. [...] In this way, then, the separable Forms, even in his system, will be seen to possess also a creative causality, whether he admits it or denies it.

Syrian. *In Metaph.* 117.25–118.11, transl. Dillon and O'Meara, modified, my emphasis)²⁸

This much-discussed passage contains several interpretative problems which need not concern us here.²⁹ At first glance, a polemical tone is easily attestable,³⁰ which could be indicative of Syrianus' critical and hostile appraisal of Aristotle's charac-

²⁸ ὁ δὲ τοσοῦτον ἀπέχει τοῦ δύνασθαι τι πρὸς τὴν ἀληθῆ τοῦ Πλάτωνος θεωρίαν εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἀναγκάζεσθαι κἄν τε συγχωρῆ κἄν τε ἀπαγορεύη, τὰ αὐτὰ τρόπον ἕτερον ἐκείνῳ φθέγγεσθαι. τὰ γὰρ χωριστὰ εἶδη τὰ παρ' αὐτῶ τελικὰ μὲν ἔστιν αἴτια καὶ ἐφετὰ τοῖς ὅλοις καὶ τοῦ εὖ καὶ τῆς τάξεως τῆς ἐγκοσμίου κατ' αὐτῶν αἴτια· δηλον δὲ τῷ μετὰ συνέσεως ἐπισκεπτομένῳ τὰ ρηθέντα, ὅτι καὶ ποιητικὰ ἂν εἴη τῶν τῆδε· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλο μὲν τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τοῦ εἶδους αἴτιον, ἄλλο δὲ τῆς τελειότητος. εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀπειροδύναμά ἐστι τὰ οὐράνια σώματα διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων ἔφεσιν, ἥτοι ἀπ' ἐαυτῶν ἔχει τὴν ἔφεσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἀπειρον ἢ ἀπ' ἐκείνων ἄμφω ἢ τό γε δεύτερον χορηγεῖται. ἀλλ' ἐαυτοῖς μὲν ἀπείρου δυνάμεως οὐκ ἂν εἴη αἴτια· παντὸς γὰρ πεπερασμένου καὶ ἡ δύναμις πεπεράνται. εἴτε δὲ ἄμφω εἴτε τὸ δεύτερον μόνον ἐκεῖθεν, δυνάμεως ὄντα τῆς κατὰ φύσιν καὶ τῆς αἰδίου χορηγὰ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι [καὶ] τοῖς δυναμουμένοις αἴτια, οἷς ὑπῆρξεν ἂν καὶ μηκέτ' εἶναι, εἰ μὴ τὴν δύναμιν ἐκεῖθεν ὑπεδέχετο. [...] οὕτω μὲν οὖν καὶ τὴν ποιητικὴν αἰτίαν ἔχοντα φανεῖται τὰ παρ' αὐτῶ χωριστὰ εἶδη, κἄν τε ὁμολογῆται τοῦτο παρ' αὐτοῦ κἄν τε ἀπαγορεύηται.

²⁹ For instance, it is not necessary to consider whether Syrianus made any assumption which would not be endorsed by Aristotle, nor do we need to delve into the issue of "infinite power." For discussions of this passage see e.g. Steel, in *Proclus* 213–225; Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* 250–251; d'Hoine, in *Reception of Aristotle* 390–391.

³⁰ Cf. ἀναγκάζεσθαι 117.27, καταναγκάζεται 118.28 (more on this below).

terization of his unmoved movers. However, I regard this polemical tone as a reasonable reaction from a Neoplatonist, on account of Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic separate Forms,³¹ rather than an indication of Syrianus' critical attitude to Aristotle's discussion of unmoved movers *in particular*.³² We should remember that as Syrianus does excuse himself somewhat in the preface to his commentary on *Metaphysics* 13–14 (80.4–81.6): if someone like him is to compose a commentary on these two books, there is no polite way of doing it.³³ However, if he had composed a commentary on *Metaphysics* 12, we would have gotten a different story. Once he has discovered that Aristotle had posited such an entity as the unmoved mover (along with the multiplicity of unmoved movers in 12.8), and granted that they are objects of desire for heavenly beings, Syrianus would be more than happy to regard Aristotle as

³¹ For the general polemical agenda of Syrianus' commentary on *Metaphysics* 13–14 see Syrian. In *Metaph.* 80.4–81.6; Dillon and O'Meara, *Syrianus: On Aristotle Metaphysics 13–14* 11–20. Certainly, this general attitude toward Aristotle's rejection of the Platonic Forms does not entail that Syrianus will be critical of every view found in *Metaphysics* 13–14.

³² Moreover, Syrianus has just accused Aristotle of not paying due attention to Plato's text in the preceding lines: when Aristotle raises objections to the Platonic Forms, "he should not just blandly ignore what Plato says" (ἔδει γὰρ μὴ κατανωτίζεσθαι τὰ ῥηθέντα σαφῶς, In *Metaph.* 117.23–24). Thus, it is more plausible to hold that Syrianus' polemical tone in T3 is rather targeted at Aristotle's 'unfair' criticism.

³³ An anonymous reader points out that Syrianus may distinguish Aristotle's personality from Aristotle's writings. And what Syrianus is particularly critical of is Aristotle's personality, as he accuses Aristotle of employing "the contentious argument" (ὁ φιλεγκλήμων λόγος, In *Metaph.* 81.29) and "dishonestly" refuting the Platonic views (τὰ λεχθέντα μοχθηρῶς ἀνατρέπειν, 81.30). But this critical attitude is also primarily consequent on Aristotle's "malicious" criticism of the Platonic theory in *Metaphysics* 13–14, and it still does not exclude the possibility that Syrianus may adopt a more reconciliatory approach to views in Aristotle's writings. And it is the views from Aristotle's works that I focus on in this article.

thereby granting that they are also efficient causes of those things, as we have read in T2: for it is widely acknowledged that God is the efficient cause for eternal beings—even if Aristotle does not say so; this last point is doubtless remiss on his part, but it does not set Aristotle at odds with Plato.³⁴

In any case, what is significant for our purpose is that in T3, Syrianus thinks that *those who understand Aristotle's text properly* will notice that Aristotle *himself also accepts* the fact that the unmoved movers are efficient causes, rather than merely final causes. This crucial point can be inferred clearly from the sentence δῆλον δὲ τῷ μετὰ συνέσεως ἐπισκεπτομένῳ τὰ ῥηθέντα. In other words, Syrianus in this passage asserts that Aristotle is *aware* that his unmoved movers are also efficient causes.

At this juncture, one may cast doubt on my interpretation by claiming that according to Syrianus, Aristotle merely attributes the efficient causality in the Aristotelian sense (a cause of movement of heavenly bodies) to his unmoved mover, but fails to grasp the Neoplatonic efficient causality (a cause of being or existence of heavenly bodies).³⁵ Therefore, T3 should still be read as a criticism of Aristotle's unsatisfying characterization of unmoved movers. However, so far as I can see, the distinction between two different understandings of the efficient cause plays no role in Syrianus' *evaluation* of Aristotle's characterization of unmoved movers in this passage.³⁶ Syrianus seems to suggest in a general way that, just like himself, Aristotle also realizes the efficient causality concerning his unmoved movers, which should be the efficient cause in the Neoplatonic sense. However, Aristotle himself did not spell out his position; hence it is left for careful readers and interpreters with proper knowl-

³⁴ My thanks go to John M. Dillon for his insightful suggestions on these observations.

³⁵ Cf. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* 253.

³⁶ The same can be said of other texts discussed in this article.

edge (μετὰ συνέσεως) to detect and elucidate the true meaning of Aristotle's text.³⁷ It is interesting to note that in this respect, Syrianus seems like Simplicius, who regularly emphasizes a similar methodology in his commentaries on Aristotle.³⁸

One may further object that T3 only indicates the following situation: according to Syrianus, Aristotle's line of reasoning should have logically made him ascribe the efficient causality to his unmoved movers, but Aristotle unfortunately *missed* this point, so that Syrianus criticizes Aristotle for illogically denying the efficient causality of his unmoved movers. I think if this were the case, then it would be unlikely for Syrianus to assert that Aristotle said *the same things* as Plato *in another way* (τὰ αὐτὰ τρόπον ἕτερον ἐκείνῳ): if Aristotle had already denied the efficient causality of "separate Forms" (namely the unmoved movers), there would be no "same thing."

That said, we must address a more serious objection. The final sentence of T3 (as well as *In Metaph.* 117.27, 118.28,

³⁷ At this point, Syrianus may contrast these knowledgeable interpreters with some 'incompetent' commentators, who take Aristotle at his very word, and fail to identify a proper (Neoplatonic) efficient causality for Aristotle's unmoved movers. Syrianus could have Alexander in mind, although he shows admiration for Alexander's commentary and makes much use of it, see Syrian. *In Metaph.* 54.12–13; C. Luna, *Trois études sur la tradition des commentaires anciens à la Métaphysique d'Aristote* (Leiden 2001) 72–98; D. O'Meara and J. M. Dillon, *Syrianus: On Aristotle Metaphysics 3–4* (London 2008) 8–9; C. D'Ancona Costa, "Commenting on Aristotle: From Late Antiquity to the Arab Aristotelianism," in W. Geerlings et al. (eds.), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden 2002) 201–251, at 207–212. Syrianus is often unsatisfied with Alexander's interpretation, when it comes to Aristotle's discussion of Plato.

³⁸ For this aspect of the methodology in Simplicius see H. Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis in Simplicius* (London 2008) 33–38, 51–53. This task of making clear what is unclear in the text is remarkably emphasized by Galen, among many others, see e.g. J. Barnes, "Metacommentary," *OSAPh* 10 (1992) 267–281, at 270–271; J. Mansfeld, *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden 1994) 148–161.

especially the use of the words ἀναγκάζεσθαι and καταναγκάζεται) may suggest that Syrianus is polemicizing against Aristotle's discussion of unmoved movers: no matter whether Aristotle attributed efficient causality to the unmoved movers or not, based on Aristotle's own premises he "is compelled to" (ἀναγκάζεσθαι, or "truth compels him to") admit it, and should not have rejected it.³⁹ Then the whole passage would indicate that Aristotle actually did not regard the unmoved mover as efficient cause. However, the construction of the last sentence, together with the use of ἀναγκάζεσθαι or similar words, in my view should be interpreted in a more neutral way in regard to Syrianus' evaluation of the theory of unmoved movers. I think that ἀναγκάζεσθαι and καταναγκάζεται need to be understood as "it is necessary such and such," instead of "being compelled to" or "truth compels someone to." Therefore, Syrianus' point is that it makes no difference whether Aristotle treats his unmoved movers as efficient causes or not in the text, because according to his own theory Aristotle would *necessarily* realize that his unmoved movers are also efficient causes, and this can be deduced logically from Aristotle's premises. But since Aristotle did not speak of it openly, it is our competent commentator's task to reveal and elucidate Aristotle's implicit conclusion. To put it another way, the final sentence of T3, together with the use of the words like ἀναγκάζεσθαι and καταναγκάζεται, does not necessarily imply that Syrianus must take up a stance critical of Aristotle's discussion of the unmoved mover and 'use Aristotle against Aristotle'. Instead, based on what Syrianus has said before with regard to his exegetical attitude to Aristotle's text, it is more reasonable to interpret this final sentence in a more positive and reconciliatory way.⁴⁰

³⁹ This would be the so-called strategy of 'using Aristotle against Aristotle'. Cf. e.g. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion* 278, on this passage.

⁴⁰ We may find a similar exegetical strategy in Simplicius, cf. Steel's formulation, "drawing conclusions where Aristotle did not make them, but

In short, my contention in this section is that in T3, Syrianus does not take up a polemical attitude towards Aristotle's theory of unmoved movers, maintaining that Aristotle fails to realize the fact that the unmoved movers are efficient causes. Instead, Syrianus agrees that Aristotle himself also attributes a kind of efficient causality to his unmoved movers, but Aristotle does not put this forward directly in his writings. In this regard, Syrianus maintains that only knowledgeable readers and commentators can grasp this correct interpretation of Aristotle's text. Therefore, Syrianus actually goes in a more reconciliatory direction in his appraisal of Aristotle's view on unmoved movers. This position can be further supported by two further passages.

3. *Further evidence in Syrianus' commentary for a reconciliatory attitude*

When it comes to Ammonius' testimony, most scholars are interested in the question whether Syrianus wrote any commentary on *Metaphysics* 7.⁴¹ In particular, it is worth noting that

should have done so if he were consistent": C. Steel, "Surface Reading and Deeper Meaning," in M. Erler et al. (eds.), *Argument und literarische Form in antiker Philosophie* (Berlin 2013) 469–494, at 485. Furthermore, Hermias claims that there is a kind of harmony between Plato and Aristotle on positing the soul as a self-mover, because "according to Aristotle's own doctrines" (ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους δογμάτων, Herm. *In Phdr.* 110.24–25 Lucarini and Moreschini) Aristotle would agree to regard the soul as self-moved. See S. Aerts, "Conflicting Authorities? Hermias and Simplicius on the Self-Moving Soul," in M. Erler et al. (eds.), *Authority and Authoritative Texts in the Platonist Tradition* (Cambridge 2021) 178–200, at 186–189, 199, for further discussion. Although it is often held that Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus* reflects Syrianus' views, I will leave that work aside in this paper.

⁴¹ E.g. R. L. Cardullo, "Syrianus' Lost Commentaries on Aristotle," *BICS* 33 (1986) 112–124, at 114–115; D. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (New York 1989) 121–122; Luna, *Trois études* 173–175; Helmig, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 372 n.84 (with further references), a majority of whom have reservations about the existence of a commentary on *Metaphysics* 7. For our purposes, however, there is no need to delve into this question.

Karl Praechter and Dominic O'Meara propose that Ammonius' report might allude to two passages in Syrianus' *extant* commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Presumably being preoccupied with the question about a purported commentary on *Metaphysics* 7, they do not discuss the implication of their findings in relation to Syrianus' alleged hostile appraisal of Aristotle's discussion of unmoved movers.⁴² In this section, I shall bring forward and analyze these two passages, arguing that Ammonius' report can indeed be regarded as an allusion to the two passages in Syrianus. Thus, these two texts can support my position that Syrianus admits that Aristotle is also aware of the efficient causality of unmoved movers.

The first is *In Metaph.* 17.20–24, which is adduced by both Praechter and O'Meara:⁴³

T4: [Arist. *Metaph.* 996b22–24: But as for coming-to-be and actions and all change, [we think we know them] when we know the cause of movement (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς κινήσεως); this is different and opposed to the final cause (τῷ τέλει).]

It is shown by this that the knowledge of the efficient cause is most necessary when it comes to actions and in general to things which move (ἐν τοῖς πρακτοῖς καὶ ὅλως τοῖς κινητοῖς). For he who does not know the principle of movement will not know the form or the finality of the thing. For instance we have often been satisfied to know that the action is that of Socrates or Pythagoras, in order to be persuaded that it is fine, wise and beneficial.

Syrian. *In Metaph.* 17.20–24, transl. O'Meara and Dillon

In this passage, Syrianus agrees with Aristotle's view at

⁴² Both Praechter and O'Meara refer to some other passages under discussion here, but they do not pursue this problem further; O'Meara simply adds that our T1 "contradicts Asclepius' report." See K. Praechter, (review of Kroll, *Syriani in Metaphysica commentaria*), *GGA* 165 (1903) 513–530, at 525, 527 n.1; O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* 121 n.7.

⁴³ Praechter, *GGA* 165 (1903) 527 n.1; O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* 121 n.7.

Metaphysics 3.2, 996b22–24 (διὰ τούτων),⁴⁴ claiming that it is necessary to know the efficient cause when we enquire into the class of movable things (τοῖς κινητοῖς). And according to Syrianus, if we want to know the formal and final causes of a movable thing, we must know the efficient cause of that thing. It appears that T4 is only speaking of the efficient causes in the sensible realm, and thus Syrianus does not necessarily include Aristotle's unmoved mover as the referent of the efficient cause. The example Syrianus then offers (Socrates or Pythagoras as the efficient cause of some noble actions) may only indicate that what Syrianus has in mind are the efficient causes in the sensible world. However, nothing prevents us from deducing that the efficient cause of all heavenly bodies—which also belong to the generable and movable things in the sensible realm—is Aristotle's unmoved mover in the intelligible realm.⁴⁵ So that in order to grasp the final and the formal causes of the heavenly bodies, we must know the efficient cause of the heavenly bodies, that is, the unmoved mover.

Nonetheless, there is a further difficulty in this passage, since we cannot rule out the possibility that the requirement of knowing the efficient cause can only be applied to those things that actually *have* an efficient cause. If there was no efficient cause of X, then we would not grasp the knowledge of the efficient cause of X. In other words, we need not know the efficient cause in order to grasp the knowledge of the efficient cause, since the object of knowledge simply does not exist at all. This proposal is compatible with the claim that for Aristotle, the unmoved mover is not an efficient cause of the heavenly

⁴⁴ See also Praechter, *GGA* 165 (1903) 527 n.1. It is another question whether Syrianus has correctly grasped Aristotle's view here (cf. Alexander's commentary, *In Metaph.* 186.4–187.13), a topic I will not deal with here.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that although in T4 Syrianus is concerned with generable and movable things in the sensible world, it does not imply that the *cause* of these things can only belong to the sensible world.

bodies. For this reason, T4 does not necessarily suggest that, for Syrianus, Aristotle must consider his unmoved mover as an efficient cause. However, since Syrianus maintains that the knowledge of the efficient cause “is most necessary” when it comes to “in general things which move” (ὅλως τοῖς κινητοῖς) at the beginning of T4, it is more plausible for him to assume that *every* movable thing has its efficient cause, including the heavenly bodies. And it is on this point that Syrianus also agrees with Aristotle: not only is the knowledge of efficient cause most necessary, but also every movable thing has its efficient cause. In this way, I think T4 can be viewed as an allusion to Ammonius’ testimony, according to which Aristotle acknowledges that the unmoved mover is also an efficient cause, just as does Syrianus himself.

Another passage where Syrianus may agree that Aristotle himself also attributes to his unmoved mover a role of efficient cause is *In Metaph.* 82.2–13, as is noted by O’Meara.⁴⁶ Although, in this passage, Syrianus is elaborating the Pythagorean view on the levels of beings, it is hard to deny that it is rather a manifestation of Syrianus’ own system.⁴⁷

T5: And the intelligible forms are at the level of the gods, and are *efficient and paradigmatic*⁴⁸ and *final causes* of what is below them; for if

⁴⁶ O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* 121 n.7.

⁴⁷ See A. Longo, “Syrianus,” in L. P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity II* (Cambridge 2010) 616–629, at 623–625, and “Syrianos,” in C. Riedweg et al. (eds.), *Die Philosophie der Antike V.3* (Basel 2018) 1880–1891, at 1884–1886, for further discussion.

⁴⁸ It is striking that in this passage, Syrianus seems to attribute a kind of paradigmatic cause to Aristotle. It is clear that most Neoplatonists do not think that Aristotle has posited a paradigmatic cause (e.g. Procl. *In Ti.* I 2.15–3.4; cf. R. Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook II* [London 2004] 138–141; C. Steel, “Why Should We Prefer Plato’s *Timaeus* to Aristotle’s *Physics*? Proclus’ Critique of Aristotle’s Causal Explanation of the Physical World,” in R. W. Sharples et al. (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato’s Timaeus* [London 2003] 175–187, at 177–183, for some

ever these three come together and are united with one another (τὰ τρία ταῦτα συντρέχει καὶ ἐνοῦται πρὸς ἄλληλα), as Aristotle maintains (καθὰ φησι καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης), this would not be observed to be the case in the lowest works of nature (ἐν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις ἔργοις τῆς φύσεως), but in the foremost and fairest and best causal principles of all things, which are productive of all things by reason of their generative and demiurgic power, while by reason of the fact that their products revert towards themselves and are assimilated to themselves they are models for all things; and since they create of themselves also their own goodness, as the divine Plato says, how would they not manifest also the final cause? The intelligible forms, then, being of this nature, and being productive of such great benefits to all things, fill the divine realms, but are most generally to be viewed in connection with the demiurgic level of reality, which is associated with Intellect proper.

Syrian. *In Metaph.* 82.2–13, transl. Dillon and O'Meara, slightly modified, my emphasis

As Dillon and O'Meara⁴⁹ rightly observe (following Wilhelm Kroll's apparatus), Syrianus' contention—according to which Aristotle regards the efficient, formal, and final causes as coinciding—refers to *Physics* 2.7, 198a24–26. In that passage, however, Aristotle is mainly talking about sublunary natural substances, especially living beings.⁵⁰ For this reason, the

discussions), and Syrianus has just accused Aristotle of not assigning a paradigmatic cause to unmoved movers in T1: παραδειγματικὴν οὐ δίδωσι (*In Metaph.* 10.38). But cf. *In Metaph.* 118.15–28, where he appears to grant unmoved movers a role of paradigmatic causality, in a similar way to what we have seen in T3. Judging from the context, however, I take the paradigmatic cause mentioned in T5 as the formal cause, or at least as something akin to the formal cause, despite the fact that most Neoplatonists draw a clear distinction between these two causes. This is not the place to discuss the whole issue; but it may imply a bolder attempt of harmonization for Syrianus, if he did intend to identify Aristotle's formal cause with the Platonic paradigmatic cause here.

⁴⁹ O'Meara and Dillon, *Syrianus: On Aristotle Metaphysics 3–4* 189 n.10.

⁵⁰ See Aristotle's example "human begets human" at *Physics* 198a26–27, cf. also *De anima* 2.4, 415b8–12.

coincidence of the efficient, formal, and final causes might not be extended to the heavenly bodies, whose cause are unmoved movers;⁵¹ and Syrianus' agreement with Aristotle here would not lie in the fact that the unmoved movers exhibit the unification of the three causes. However, I think Syrianus goes much beyond this point, although this move might not be well-supported by Aristotle's text. When Syrianus claims that it is the intelligible forms at the level of the gods that have the three kinds of causality with regard to what is below them, it is reasonable to propose that he also has Aristotle's unmoved movers in mind. And he will further maintain that Aristotle attributes a kind of efficient causality to these unmoved movers, because of the unification of these three causes. Therefore, I think that, in T5, Syrianus agrees that, for Aristotle, there exists the coincidence of these causes in the case of the heavenly bodies.⁵² To put it differently, the agreement between Aristotle and Syrianus consists not merely in the *unification* of these three causes, but in the fact that this unification *can be applied to the heavenly bodies and unmoved movers*.⁵³ Now since the cause of the

⁵¹ *Physics* 198a27–31, with W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford 1936) 526–527.

⁵² It should be noted that when Aristotle says it is the case “with things which are themselves changed in changing other things” at *Physics* 198a27, he can still include the heavenly bodies—which are moved by the unmoved mover and move sublunary beings somehow. His point is that *the three causes of X* coincide; in this case, therefore, it is the three causes of the heavenly bodies that coincide, which manifests in the unmoved mover. Therefore, Aristotle can also include the intelligible unmoved mover in this *Physics* passage; and it may not be the case that he is concerned with the sensible realm at 198a24–26, while Syrianus focuses on the intelligible world in T5.

⁵³ When Syrianus claims that the unification of these three causes “would not be observed to be the case in the lowest works of nature, but in the foremost and fairest and best causal principles of all things” (82.5–7), it does not necessarily rule out the possibility that this unification can still be found somewhere below the intelligible one. The reason is that “the lowest work of nature” in Neoplatonism refers to those which “are the most deeply em-

heavenly bodies is the unmoved mover, which exhibits the unification of these three causes, it can be concluded that the unmoved mover in the intelligible realm is also the efficient cause of the heavenly bodies.

This point can be confirmed from the end of T5, where Syrianus suggests that these unmoved movers are “associated with Intellect proper.” And it is evident that, for Syrianus and most Neoplatonists, the level of the Intellect also includes Aristotle’s unmoved mover.⁵⁴ Moreover, it can be argued on the basis of Ammonius’ testimony that for sensible beings, especially for artefacts, Syrianus does not think that the efficient cause coincides with the final cause: a particular house can be produced by different people (see Asclep. *In Metaph.* 450.24–25), but all houses may have the same final cause.⁵⁵ And at T4,

bedded in matter” (Procl. *In Ti.* I 6.18), and these things may not exhibit the coincidence of the three causes also for Aristotle. Also, it is uncertain whether Syrianus must make a strong case here that the unification of these causes can *only* be found in the foremost principles, if we only stick to this passage (*pace* Longo, in *Die Philosophie der Antike* V.3 1885).

⁵⁴ E.g. Verrycken, in *Aristotle Transformed* 199–231 (but note the more complicated situation in Ammonius discussed at 218–223); Opsomer, in *Physics and Philosophy of Nature* 189–229, esp. 210. For our purposes, there is no need to worry about the more elaborate ontological levels within the Second Hypostasis, i.e. Intellect, as we find in Proclus’ metaphysical system. See e.g. S. K. Wear, *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato’s Timaeus and Parmenides* (Leiden 2011) 10–14.

⁵⁵ Notably, Syrianus at *In Metaph.* 8.6–7 states that Aristotle regards the cause separable from matter “as being the object desired by all things (ὡς ὀρεκτὸν τῶν πάντων), whereas Plato saw it also as generative of all things (καὶ ὡς γεννητικὸν τῶν ὅλων). One may propose that, according to this passage, Syrianus must not attribute an efficient causality to Aristotle’s unmoved mover. However, this may not be the case. What Syrianus indicates here is that Aristotle’s unmoved mover is not the efficient cause for *all things*. This also squares with Asclepius’ commentary, where Syrianus was reported to deny that there existed one determinate efficient cause for all generable things (Asclep. *In Metaph.* 450.23–25). Therefore, Syrian. *In Metaph.* 8.6–7 does not exclude the possibility that, for Syrianus, Aristotle’s unmoved

Syrianus supposes that the efficient cause of a noble action is Socrates or Pythagoras, but it is not always the case that the final cause of a noble action is also the person who did it. For these reasons, we may conclude that, in Syrianus' view, the unification of these three causes manifests in the unmoved movers, which (according to Syrianus) is also endorsed, albeit tacitly, by Aristotle. Otherwise, if Syrianus thought that he and Aristotle had completely different ideas on the application of the unification of these causes, it would be very odd for him to speak of his agreement with Aristotle in T5. In this way, T5 can also give support to my position that Syrianus admits that Aristotle himself also grants his unmoved mover a role of efficient cause, and this passage can indeed be deemed as a source of Ammonius' report.

In this section I have argued that there are two further passages in favor of Syrianus' reconciliatory appraisal of the efficient causality of Aristotle's unmoved mover. However, there still remains the problem of T1, where Syrianus' critical or polemical attitude seems too unequivocal. In the final section I will re-evaluate this passage, and attempt to square it with other passages discussed above, in order to defend my reconciliatory position.

4. *In Metaph. 10.32–11.5 revisited*

Let us return to T1. Admittedly, it is difficult to explain away this passage completely.⁵⁶ Here I propose two suggestions, in

mover is nonetheless an efficient cause for eternal things.

⁵⁶ Syrianus made a more radical point at *In Metaph.* 175.21–23, where he not only asserted that Aristotle did not consider the unmoved movers as efficient causes, but also denied that Aristotle had ever posited the Forms (τὰ εἶδη) or the primary causal principles (τὰς ἀρχηγικὰς αἰτίας). At any rate, this claim can hardly be compatible with other passages discussed in this paper (even in T1, Aristotle is said by Syrianus to have admitted the existence of the Forms). Perhaps my interpretations provided here can also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to this passage, especially if we note that Syrianus in that passage again contrasted Aristotle with the Platonists (175.27–29).

order to make this passage congruent with my view. First, it seems to me that what Syrianus aimed to emphasize in T1 is to contrast Plato with Aristotle on the issue of principles, after acknowledging their shared views (viz. the existence of the eternal causes and the final causality of these eternal causes). In order to praise the former and downplay the latter, Syrianus may *overstate* the difference between Plato and Aristotle on the issue of efficient causality of the immaterial forms (or Aristotle's unmoved movers), and simply asserts that Aristotle did not ascribe efficient causes to his unmoved movers at all.

But there is another way to make sense of T1. My second interpretation is based on a passage that follows immediately after. Here Syrianus may hold the same nuanced attitude to Aristotle's text as we have encountered in T3.

T6: One might well admire the fair-mindedness (ἐπιεικείας) with which Aristotle does not think that the opinions of elders are lightly to be despised, but [require] much attention, especially the opinions regarding the very first principles. *And I think he will agree that* (οἶμαι συγχωρήσειν αὐτόν) it is necessary that, there being many visible and intelligible substances, all of them depend on one principle, which one might characterize as being that which primarily is. *But what he does not say from this point on* (αὐτόθεν), *but which necessarily follows from what he posits, this it is for us to say* (ταῦτ' ἂν εἴη λέγειν ἡμέτερον). And so we say that all beings would not desire that which primarily is, were it not the case that they acquired their perfection from it; and that that on which they depend for all eternity, from this they also received eternally their being. Consequently, if that which primarily is is desired by all beings, and it is the cause of being for all (τοῦ εἶναι τοῖς πᾶσιν αἴτιον), [then] it is nothing other than that which primarily is, so that it may be the cause of all beings, *producing from itself substantial number and what are truly beings and intelligible forms* (παράγον δὲ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ τόν τε οὐσιώδη ἀριθμὸν καὶ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα καὶ νοητὰ εἶδη).

Syrian. *In Metaph.* 11.7–19, transl. O'Meara and Dillon, my emphasis

Unlike the immediately preceding passage (= T1), here Syrianus takes up a more favorable stance toward Aristotle.⁵⁷ He proposes that Aristotle would agree (οἶμαι συγχωρήσειν αὐτόν, 11.11) that there is one principle, which is considered as “that which primarily is.” He further maintains that for Aristotle, all other substances, sensible or intelligible, depend on that first principle, which is desired by all these substances. Now it is clear that this first principle refers to Aristotle’s prime mover (cf. *Metaph.* 12.10).⁵⁸ It is worth noting that, according to Syrianus, Aristotle once again did not spell out his view on the first principle (μὴ λέγει μὲν αὐτόθεν, 11.11–12).⁵⁹ Rather, Aristotle’s position can be deduced from what he has said in the text necessarily (ἐπόμενα δὲ ἐστὶν ἀναγκαίως οἷς τίθησι, 11.12). And it is our (Neoplatonic) commentator’s task to make these implications explicit (ταῦτ’ ὄν εἴη λέγειν ἡμέτερον, 11.12–13). More importantly, when Syrianus explicates Aristotle’s idea, he claims that this primary principle, being a final cause for all other substances, also “produces from itself substantial number and what are truly beings and intelligible forms” (11.18–19).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See esp. *In Metaph.* 11.7–9, as Helmig observes, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 371 n.82.

⁵⁸ The relation between the prime mover and other subordinate unmoved movers that emerges in T6 need not worry us, because my concern in this article is with Syrianus’ interpretation of the unmoved mover as a whole, which chiefly manifests itself in Aristotle’s prime mover. In other passages under discussion, Syrianus does not make a clear-cut distinction between Aristotle’s prime mover and other subordinate unmoved movers, but rather treats the unmoved movers as a whole. In this passage his primary focus is on the prime mover.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that when Syrianus claims that Aristotle did not say (μὴ λέγει) such and such, it does not imply that Aristotle did not intend such and such in a more implicit and obscure way.

⁶⁰ Here Syrianus may also conceive Aristotle’s prime mover as the efficient cause of other subordinate unmoved movers, as can be inferred from the notion νοητὰ εἶδη (see T5, cf. also Syrian. *In Metaph.* 8.9–11). But nothing prevents both prime mover and subordinate unmoved movers from being

This final sentence crucially suggests that Syrianus does agree that for Aristotle, the prime mover is also an efficient cause. And the prime mover is not only an efficient cause of movement, as Alexander also accepts,⁶¹ but also an efficient cause of existence, which can be attested from the phrase τοῦ εἶναι τοῖς πᾶσιν ἄριστον, 11.16–17). In this respect, T6 provides a further piece of evidence for my proposal: Syrianus does think that Aristotle himself would also agree to take his unmoved mover as an efficient cause.

Furthermore, since T6 and T1 are only separated by a *lemma* (viz. *Metaph.* 3.1, 996a4–9), and both passages seem to address a similar topic, we can reasonably attribute a kind of unity and continuity to the two comments.⁶² In this way, if we read T1 in light of T6, we will be in a better position to understand Syrianus' attitude in T1. It is possible to make the following proposal: what Syrianus may be understood to state in T1 is that “Aristotle does not assign the efficient cause to his unmoved mover *explicitly*; unlike Plato, Aristotle attributes an efficient cause to the unmoved mover only *implicitly*, which

efficient causes of other eternal beings below them (cf. *Simpl. In Phys.* II 1361.30–31). In this way, for Syrianus, all unmoved movers are efficient causes, which (in his view) is also endorsed by Aristotle himself.

⁶¹ See esp. *Simpl. In Phys.* II 1362.11–20, I 258.14–25.

⁶² The insertion of *lemmata* between different exegetical parts may obscure the unity and continuity of these exegetical sections, as some Neoplatonic exegeses were initially composed continuously on a separate book, cf. I. Kupreeva, *Philoponus: On Aristotle on Coming-To-Be and Perishing 2.5–11* (London 2005) 1–2; P. Hoffmann, “What was Commentary in Late Antiquity? The Example of the Neoplatonic Commentators,” in M. L. Gill et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford 2006) 597–622, at 616–617 (with a reference to Syrianus); Baltussen, *Philosophy and Exegesis* 114–116; B. Graziosi, “Commentaries,” in G. Boys-Stones et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies* (New York 2009) 788–801, at 794. Moreover, Syrianus' commentary on the *Metaphysics* can be regarded as a set of self-contained essays (see Frede, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 40), which will exhibit a higher degree of unity within one essay than other ‘running commentaries’ in antiquity.

awaits sensitive readers and commentators to discover and reveal it.” In this case, it can be concluded that T1 does not suggest the polemical side of Syrianus’ appraisal of Aristotle’s theory of unmoved movers.

This second proposal may gain more support from the attempt to read T6 back into T1, which grants the whole relevant section more coherence. However, if this is the case, then it will still be difficult to explain why in T1 Syrianus would claim that the philosophy of Aristotle falls short of (ἀπολείπεται) the philosophy of Plato. Perhaps one solution is to understand the word ἀπολείπεται in a deflationary way, which implies more an apparent difference *in expression* than a substantial difference *in doctrine*.⁶³ This tentative suggestion would make some sense, if we accepted Ilsetraut Hadot’s speculation, which credited Syrianus with a far more reconciliatory attitude to Aristotle’s highest principle here. According to Hadot, at the end of T1 Syrianus even attributes to Aristotle a recognition of the Neoplatonic One,⁶⁴ by asserting that Aristotle “also says all things desire the good, and if there are many goods, they are all ordered to those which are superior and these to one (πάντα πρὸς τὰ κυριώτερα προστέτακται καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς ἓν), the highest and most perfect (τὸ ὑπέρτατον καὶ τελικώτατον) of all” (Syrian. *In Metaph.* 11.3–5, transl. O’Meara and Dillon). If for Syrianus, Aristotle did recognize the One in his works, then the philosophy of Aristotle would not be much inferior to that of Plato.⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. Simplicius’ contrast between λέξις and νοῦς at *In Cat.* 7.29–32 Kalbfleisch (a passage which can be traced back to Syrianus’ exegetical attitude towards Aristotle’s text in T3 and T6).

⁶⁴ Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism* 28 n.85, 63, 96, 105, 108, 135–136. Although she still does not believe that Syrianus would agree that Aristotle had acknowledged the efficient causality of his unmoved movers, on my analysis in this paper there is no good reason for accepting this position any longer.

⁶⁵ But see e.g. Syrianus *In Metaph.* 118.21–22 (cf. Helmig, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 367 n.73, for some other passages), where Syrianus denies that

A proper examination of Hadot's ambitious hypothesis will have to wait for another occasion. In any case, what I attempt to establish in this section is that T1 can still be interpreted in accordance with my 'reconciliatory' proposal defended in this article, especially when we adopt a contextualizing approach, and take up a deflationary reading.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have defended a more reconciliatory picture of Syrianus' appraisal of Aristotle's theory of the unmoved mover. *Contra* the received view in contemporary literature, according to which Syrianus is polemical against Aristotle's discussion of unmoved movers and criticizes him for not realizing the efficient causality of the unmoved mover, I have argued that Syrianus in fact not only attributes the efficient causality to the unmoved mover, but also proposes that Aristotle himself needs to acknowledge this point. In this way, we will be in a better position to reconsider Syrianus' attitude to Aristotle's philosophy, which is more multifaceted and subtle than commonly thought. To be clear, Syrianus did proceed in a polemical mode in his commentary on *Metaphysics* 13–14, but he also wished to adhere to the general thesis that Aristotle, while necessarily inferior to Plato, is in accord with his master in all essentials, although in many cases Aristotle does not say as much expressly, and it is the commentator's task to spell this out.

Moreover, my conclusion may also shed light on our understanding of the influence of Syrianus on Proclus and later Neoplatonists. As mentioned above, Proclus overtly criticized Aristotle's theory of the unmoved mover; in doing so, he seems to differentiate himself from his master's more reconciliatory attitude. This will enable us to re-evaluate the innovative

Aristotle has posited the One: τὸ γὰρ ἓν καὶ ἀπλήθοντον καὶ ὑπερούσιον ἀρνεῖται. Also, one may object that ἓν at *In Metaph.* 11.4 merely refers to the prime mover, and τὰ κυριώτερα should be understood as other subordinate unmoved movers.

quality of Proclus' philosophical system and his indebtedness to Syrianus.⁶⁶ On the other hand, we have seen that Proclus' student Ammonius also departed from his teacher, and returned to his 'intellectual grandfather'⁶⁷ on this issue. Ammonius took up and amplified the harmonizing or reconciliatory agenda, which had already been adumbrated in Syrianus.⁶⁸

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Department of Philosophy and Science
Southeast University
Nanjing, P. R. China
getianqin@seu.edu.cn

⁶⁶ For Proclus' indebtedness to Syrianus see e.g. Frede, in *Syrianus et la métaphysique* 25–27 (with further references).

⁶⁷ Expressions such as προπάτωρ and πρόγονος can be found in other Neoplatonists' writings: e.g. Procl. *In Pm.* 1058.22 Cousin; Marin. *Procl.* 29 (Proclus to Plutarch of Athens); Olymp. *In Mete.* 153.7 Stüve (Olympiodorus to Ammonius). See E. Watts, "Doctrine, Anecdote, and Action: Reconsidering the Social History of the Last Platonists (c. 430–c. 550 C.E.)," *CP* 106 (2011) 226–244, for a discussion of this phenomenon.

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